

LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

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quantities of ducks and geese, and the inhabitants of the inland villages sometimes made hunting expeditions to the nesting places of wild-fowl in the lakes of the interior uplands. Although numbers of birds were sometimes killed in this way, they were never a steady article of diet. The same is true of grouse. Always plentiful, these birds were commonly killed, but never in large numbers. 223 [136] [262]

The basis of the food supply was fish. The river teemed with salmon, which enabled the country to support its relatively large population. Spring, sockeye, hump-back, dog, and coho salmon, all entered the river in thousands during the spring and summer, while the steel-head could be caught throughout the year. They were taken in weirs and their flesh smoked for winter use. Throughout the year, salmon was the principal article of diet. Second in importance was the olachen, a fish somewhat resembling a herring, which entered the river in great numbers during April or May. They were taken in purse-like nets,^a allowed to rot for ten days or two weeks, and then boiled. The grease was skimmed off and kept indefinitely to be used as a relish for other foods. It was always a sign of poverty if a person were obliged to eat berries without olachen grease. Trout and bull-heads were found in the river, but were not sufficiently plentiful to be of importance. 226 262 [251] [252] [263] [237] [735] [556]

Although no form of agriculture was practised, the Bella Coola used vegetable food to a considerable extent. Berries were abundant; some were eaten raw, but many more were pounded into a pulpy mass and dried in the sun. Cakes prepared in this way kept indefinitely and formed one of the regular winter foods. The bark of the hemlock and cottonwood was eaten, as well as the roots of many plants. In recent years many of these have not been used, so that an investigator is apt to overlook their great importance in early times. Although useless for food, the cedar was the corner-stone of Bella Coola material culture. From its trunk were split out, with wedges, the wide planks which formed 262 [241] [251] [178] 824 322

^aSee Appendix A for a description of olachen fishing.

FEATURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE POTLATCH 255

of their occurrence in most ancestral myths.* There seems to be no mythological explanation for the casting of a copper into the fire after the passing of the representation of a deceased relative, but the desire of chiefs to use them at potlatches is the result of their use under similar circumstances by their ancestors. Some ancestral myths lack reference to coppers, but their use is common to all, whether or not embodied in such. It is said to be easier for a chief to acquire coppers if they had been used by his ancestors, but this is not essential.

When arranging for the appearance of a dead relative, the donor of a potlatch is careful either to possess a copper, or to be able to borrow one at the right moment. As soon as the masked figure has disappeared, the donor stands up, breaks or bends his copper, and throws it into the fire "to make bone for the deceased." No matter how valuable a copper may have been, it is now worthless; its value has been expended on the purpose for which it has just been employed. It lies unheeded in the flames, a valueless article belonging to no one.

At some convenient time, either hours or days later, any chief may remove the copper and give it to a poor man, only taking care to choose an individual who has not recently received one. It is said that the gift is "to patch his canoe." It is now the poor man's property, but it has no value, since no goods have been expended for it. The new owner straightens and repairs it, if necessary by riveting on the broken piece, thus making it ready for further use. The poor man may keep the copper for years, or it may be only a few weeks before some chief, preparing for a potlatch, offers, perhaps, \$20, for it. In the old days, values were computed in slaves, canoes, salmon, and other commodities, but now in dollars. If two chiefs should happen to want it, the poor man may haggle about the price, though in such a case the two rivals would probably agree amicably rather than lower their dignity by seeming to be interested in a matter of money. It is to the advantage of a

*Abalone-shells and moosehides are treasured for the same reason; the former are mentioned in several origin myths, the latter in two at least.

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* 556 chief to pay somewhat lavishly, since the value of the copper
[435] depends on the amount expended on it.

[437] The \$20 received by the poor man must not be casually
* 556 spent. He is expected to invite the whole village to his house,
• 735 otherwise he would never again be given a copper. The heralds
[533] call everyone to the house, the singers as usual being the first
[575] to arrive. They beat out the *kusiut* song of anyone, to which
the owner dances; the songs are used one after another, until
almost every member of the society has danced. *Sisaok* songs
may then be used in the same way. Since the supernatural
beings are not present, the rite has no religious significance;
it is merely a social affair. At the close of the dancing, the
poor man distributes food to all, equivalent in value to the
money received. It is probable that poor men sometimes
give away slightly less than they have received, although
any noticeable laxity in this would be punished by the receipt
of no further coppers. The recipient of a copper from a fire
derives no direct gain from it, though it is to his indirect
advantage, since a person who has given away food is likely
to receive larger presents on future occasions than one who
has not.

435 Meanwhile the chief owning the copper is unable to use it
* 556 at his potlatch since the value, dependent on the goods ex-
pended for it, is only \$20, a sum so small that to use it would
be insulting to his dead ancestor. There are several ways of
increasing its value:

[532] (1) *By Painting*. Taking advantage of some ceremony
when a number of people are present, the owner gives a car-
penter \$10, for example, with a request that he paint on his
copper a representation of the crest used by his, the owner's,
first ancestor, when coming to this earth. Henceforth the
value of the copper is \$30.

435 (2) *By Naming*. The Bella Coola say that among the
552 Kwakiutl names are given to almost all coppers; in Bella
* 556 Coola it is a rare practice. Occasionally, a chief creates a
name for his copper and validates this by presents to all the

855 well, and these are soon learnt by the child who is fortunate
[867] enough to have many kinsmen. Primarily, responsibility rests
with the parents for the care and support of their offspring, but
they have the advice, assistance, and material aid of their
relatives. Nor are these limited to the near kindred of either
father or mother; all members of the ancestral family take
their part. Housemates, also, even if unrelated, take an in-
terest in any child who shares their habitation, irrespective of
his rank.

868 Much of the care bestowed on children is of a magical
nature and must be reserved until a later chapter. Little boys
follow their fathers on hunting expeditions and so acquire knowl-
edge by practical experience, as do girls from their mothers
with regard to household tasks and feminine occupations.

867 Even small children are quick to notice the attention paid to
the orders of chiefs, and carry out their commands without
demur. A disobedient child is beaten or thrown into cold
861 water; the parents usually act in such cases, though a near
relative does not hesitate to do so, especially if he is a chief.

857 Like all other children, Bella Coola boys and girls are fond of
stories and listen eagerly to the tales told in the long evenings
867 by some old man or woman. Many of these are somewhat
538 obscene, but they serve to teach much ancient lore, and at the
same time to emphasize many taboos and restrictions which
are thus assimilated without definite schooling. They illus-

[626] trate the laws of morality, as does the public disapproval shown
to anyone who infringes some point of etiquette or behaviour.

[825] If a child makes fun of a cat-fish or a bull-head, he is not told
to stop doing so; instead, one of his elders tells him how, in the
distant past, there was a famine, and advises him not to scoff
at the fish which alone saved his ancestors from starvation at
that time. If a rude little boy laughs at a maimed or deformed
[732] man, he is told of *Atalals*, a Bella Bella urchin who repeatedly
mocked a one-eyed man and presently, himself, lost the sight
of an eye.

867 "Don't laugh at cripples, blind people, or those who are
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BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE

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poverty-stricken," say the elders. "If you do, you will become like them yourself."

As a boy grows older, his father insists that he wash, pray, and practise other ritual acts likely to win approval from supernatural beings. He is frequently beaten to inure him to hardship. By the time a youth is eleven or twelve years of age he has become fully acquainted with the principles of the potlatch system and a wise parent teaches him to remember debts. Taking his son to some quiet spot in the woods, he makes a small bundle of cedar twigs, for example, and tells him:

"So-and-so at Bella Bella gave you fifteen beaver skins. When you see this bundle you must think of those skins."

Then he takes another bunch, perhaps of spruce twigs, to represent a present from a Rivers Inlet chief. A bundle of nettle fibre may stand for a Kimsquit debt; one ornamented with a tuft of undyed cedar-bark, a gift from a *Täl-io* chief; a solid piece of alder stem, a local debt; another section of alder stem with a notch in it, another local debt, and so on. The son is expected to listen attentively, and to repeat after his father what each represents. Then the pupil turns his back and the instructor alters the positions of the bundles. His father tells him to look at them and repeat what each signifies. This is repeated time after time until a boy becomes familiar with remembering debts by means of symbols. In later years, if he becomes a chief, he will use this method for bearing his indebtedness in mind. No system of standardized signs has been evolved, each individual merely designates what he wishes by a mark which he alone can recognize.

A child grows up in the community, absorbing information and lore without conscious effort, learning the activities which he will later practise, fearing the supernatural beings that are dreaded by his parents, marvelling at the power of those endowed with supernatural ability, and generally fitting himself for the struggle of life. If his parents are wealthy, he may be fortunate enough to be given a *susook* name and to partake in

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DEATH

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place in the manner already described. After passing through the fourth hole, or for the fourth time through the single opening, the two go to some lonely pool in the forest where the mourner washes. They light a fire and deposit on it some of his clothing, placing the rest in a stump or hollow tree. The friend always takes with him a supply of new clothing which the person being purified puts on and returns home, cleansed from the immediate taint of death.

The above rite protects widower or widow, but does not alter the fact that for one year they are ceremonially "unclean" and must obey sundry taboos. They must not go to the bank of the river, or even appear at the front door of a house facing it. To do so is displeasing to the salmon; for the same reason they cannot eat this fish unless it has been smoked. If they wish to travel on the ocean, they cannot embark at the village but must go through the woods to a point on the shore and there be picked up by the canoe. There is a regular "Widows and Widowers Rock" about a mile on either side of every village on the ocean. The one near Kimsquit is called *Sqtan'ti*, and there is thought to be blood on it. A person mourning a consort must wear a hat decorated with miniature coppers of which the bottoms are bent upwards; should this be omitted, when the offender remarries, the new husband or wife will soon die.

In addition to these taboos, there are customary laws of behaviour, an infraction of which renders the offender liable to social disapproval. Widows and widowers should cut their hair short, and the former should rub ashes on the face. Sexual intercourse is prohibited to both sexes; if this rule is broken, the relatives of the deceased are insulted. Remarriage should not take place for at least a year, although among poor people it sometimes occurs after only six months, in which case all taboos and restrictions automatically cease. There is no law on this point, but it is considered fitting to allow this period to elapse. These requirements clearly indicate that bereavement is not merely an individual affair, but entails social and

SONGS

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(a) Recorded as song VII D 28a, National Museum of Canada; singer, Jim Pollard. The tune is said to have been handed down for more than two hundred years.

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(b) That is: Let us stop paying the customary respect to.

(c) It is not remembered which chief was thus held up to the scorn of his fellows.

(d) That is: He does not act in accordance with the traditions of the name he uses.

(e) That is: The dancer is feeble. This refers to another *nusqwal* dancer who, owing to his poverty, had not performed for many years. It is not known whether he was the same individual as the one derided in the first part of the song.

(f) To flaunt another's poverty in his face is the height of Bella Coola rudeness.

(g) That is: He, too, was a *nusqwal*.

(h) The ancestor from whom the prerogative was derived.

(i) That is: In virtue of my *nusqwal* ability. This appears to be a departure from the usual theme of a mocking song.

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Nusqwal Song Used for Qwixlakikak, a Kimsquit Man(a)

<i>A Takadjidjidumalnuwis</i>	<i>yqwxlakikakwudai</i>	<i>sko'anutsayenmixwais</i>
Please do not sleep,	<i>Qwixlakikak</i> (b),	listen to your

sawapetlannuwais
drums(c).

[WORDLESS CHORUS]

<i>B Sanaamoodjamadu</i>	<i>snuyaiyatuwikais</i>	<i>altaltamstaqaisandai</i>
I alone	am content(d);	is increasing

aiyadispeliwatsdai
my prerogative(e).

[WORDLESS CHORUS]

C The third part has been forgotten.

(a) Recorded as song VII D 29a, National Museum of Canada; singer, Jim Pollard.

(b) It is not uncommon in *sasok* and *a'alk* songs for the dancer to address himself in this way.

(c) That is: Be ready to listen to drums beaten at one of your ceremonies.

(d) The dancer is deriding another *nusqwal* who has not performed for a long time.

(e) This song differs slightly from the usual mocking type in lack of specific references to the person derided; lack of reference to an ancestral myth, however, shows that it was not composed for a potlatch.

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(Song of a Kimsquit Nusqwal(a))

<i>A Dipu-ngo</i>	<i>huln'laix</i>	<i>da:stahmgwas</i>	<i>disiut</i>
That is he,	the impostor,	the chief	of the paddle(b).

[WORDLESS CHORUS]